

ACTS – Lesson 25

Acts Chapter 25

Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

e-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Memory verses for this week: *1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*

Introduction: In Chapter 24, the elders come down from Jerusalem and bring an eloquent speaker named Tertullus to bring their accusations against Paul. He did an excellent job, and Paul spoke in his own defense and pointed out how nothing they claimed against him could be proven. Felix later allowed Paul to come before he and his wife Drusilla where Christ was presented by Paul for their salvation.

Felix was under such great conviction that he trembled, and told Paul to go away and come back at a time when it was more convenient. As far as we know, Felix never found that more convenient time. We need to not fall for the trick of procrastination that Satan uses to keep the lost bound under sin. Felix was later replaced as governor of Judea, and when he departs the office, he does the Jews a favor by leaving Paul bound in prison.

In this chapter, the new Roman procurator at Caesarea continues playing political games with Paul. There were no legal grounds to continue to hold Paul, but for political reasons, he used the system to keep Paul detained. Paul, as a Roman citizen, appeals to Caesar as his last court of appeal. That appeal was granted possibly just to get Paul out of their sight. King Agrippa II and his cohort Bernice become involved in the charade and travesty of justice concerning Paul.

I. Paul Before Festus

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Acts 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

Acts 25:3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

The new Roman procurator (i.e., governor) Festus arrived in Caesarea. He, no doubt, wished to make political capital with those whom he governed. This occurred just three days after assuming rule. He wasted no time while traveling up to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leadership there. A new high priest named

Ishmael, along with his subordinates, immediately informed Festus against Paul and sought after him.

They were experienced in political tradeoffs with the Romans and immediately sought a political favor from Festus. Their plan was simple. In having Paul brought to Jerusalem, they would way-lay him along the way and kill him.

Festus is a ruler that we have little information about with the exception of what is said about him here in the bible. The historian Josephus discussed him and said that he had a good name and was a conscientious ruler. After only three days in office there in Caesarea, Festus goes down to Jerusalem to find out more about the people he was to rule.

We see the difference in what is presented to Festus is that no orator like Tertullus was present, but just the high priest and the chief of the Jews. Little had changed in their hatred for Paul, as it says in verse three they sought favor that they might have Paul sent back where they could lie in wait and kill him. If you remember, they had earlier planned to kill Paul before the Captain sent him to Felix. It had been over two years since Paul had been judged by Felix.

Acts 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Acts 25:4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

Acts 25:5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

Festus, a career politician, was suspicious of their request. Though he cared little about them or Paul, as the presiding Roman officer of the province, he was responsible for protecting Roman citizens. He informed the Jews that Paul would remain at Caesarea. If they wanted to come down there and pursue the matter further, he would hear the case there.

Acts 25:6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

Acts 25:7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

After ten days, Festus returned to Caesarea and Jewish authorities came as well. The next day, he sat on the judgement seat and ordered Paul to be brought forth. The Jews used no lawyer this time. Rather they “stood round about” Paul as

accusers making vehement charges against him. Luke was evidently present, and he records that they could not prove any of their allegations.

Festus showed wisdom and said that Paul would stay there at Caesarea and those that had any accusations against him should come and present them as Festus sat on the judgment seat. Upon his return, Festus brings Paul before him.

Acts 25:8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

Paul, once again, answered for himself. The word translated as answered (apologeomai apololegeomai) has the sense to 'defend oneself.' The English word apologetic is related in its derivation. Paul summarized the allegations pending against him.

- (1) Violating Jewish law.
- (2) Violating the Jewish Temple.
- (3) Violating Roman law regarding sedition.

The Jews could offer no evidence whatsoever concerning any of these charges. Festus only would have interest in the third category (sedition). Paul was well aware and noted this by proclaiming, "Nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all."

Acts 25:9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

To Festus, the whole affair was a matter of political gamesmanship. Festus cared nothing for justice, truth, or fairness for Paul. He did see a good opportunity to make political capital. Though he was not elected by the Jews, currying their favor would be a plus on his resume and further advance his career as a politician.

From his corrupt perspective, he had more to gain by pleasing the Jews than by executing justice and releasing Paul. Festus, for his own selfish reasons, offered Paul the opportunity for another hearing at Jerusalem. Paul immediately saw through what was happening. He had not received justice from either Felix or now Festus. He correctly realized that he was being made a political football.

If Festus would not deal with him fairly in Caesarea, he knew he stood no chance in the highly prejudicial atmosphere of Jerusalem. Over the last two years, Paul no doubt had much time to consider his legal status as a Roman citizen. He now

knew Festus was no better than Felix and maybe worse. He knew what his answer must be.

We find that the accusations are the same as when Paul stood before Felix. Many false complaints, but no substance to them. Nothing could be proved, and Paul states there in verse 8 that there was “Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended anything at all.”

Festus at this point could have acquitted Paul (and should have), but rather desires to do the Jews a pleasure and asks if Paul will go back to Jerusalem to be tried. The complaints were all grievous and unfounded, and the right thing would have been to release Paul. But that was not what Festus did.

II. Paul Appeals to Caesar

*Acts 25:10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.
Acts 25:11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.*

Paul invoked his rights as a Roman citizen. He replied to Festus, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged.” As procurator of the province of Judaea, Festus was the representative of Rome. As a Roman citizen, Festus had no right to hand him over to a Jewish tribunal. Paul reminded him that he had done no wrong to the Jews or against Rome. Yet Festus, for political reasons, was trying to turn him over to the Jews.

Continuing, Paul declared that if he were an offender (i.e., a criminal) guilty of a capital offense, he was willing to face the charges. But, since there was no basis for the charges pending against him, he reminded Festus that under Roman law even he could not legally deliver him to the Jews. Paul, no doubt, had thought long over what he was about to say. He, no doubt, had long reflected concerning his desire to see Rome and that Jesus had promised him that he would see it in Acts 23:11.

As Roman law had developed, a Roman citizen had the right to appeal what he believed to be an unjust matter directly to Caesar. Paul knew he would receive no justice from this corrupt council, therefore, he took the case out of the hands of Festus. He announced to Festus and the Jews present, “I appeal unto Caesar.”

W. A. Criswell in the Bible Believer's Bible said this:

These were words of destiny. Roman law made provision for any Roman-born citizen who felt he was not being tried fairly to “appeal to Caesar,” where presumably he might receive full justice. This, too, was abused by the emperors, for even in Rome Paul remained in prison for at least two years (cf. 28:30). However, within the providence of God, it was during this time that he produced some of his greatest epistles. These are the so-called “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul was clear in his thinking. He knew to agree to return to Jerusalem would mean his death, so in order to live, he appeals to Caesar. This was all in the plan of God if you remember what God had told Ananias concerning Paul when he was saved and sent forth as an apostle unto the Gentiles.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Paul acknowledged that if he had done anything worthy of death, he was willing to die. But if not, he appealed unto Caesar.

Acts 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

Festus now faced a political crisis as well as a legal challenge. Though Rome often winked at the corruption of its provincial rulers, an appeal to Caesar under Roman law was something Festus could not ignore. He met with his council of advisors who concurred that Festus had no choice but to grant the appeal.

There perhaps was a sneer in his tone when he said to Paul, “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go.” What seemingly was implied is the idea, ‘You really don’t know what you are getting into, but if this is what you want, have at it.’ Festus now faced the political embarrassment of finding some sort of legal pretense for having not released Paul in the first place.

Festus really had no alternative than to send Paul on to Rome where he would stand before Caesar. We know God had intended for Paul to witness about Christ before many kings which he certainly did do.

I thought J. Vernon McGee’s comments on Paul’s desire to go before Caesar were very good. “There are some people who think that Paul made a mistake here, that he should never have appealed to Caesar. They think he should simply have let his case rest with Festus. Friend, don’t you see that Festus was going to use Paul for his own political ends? Festus was going to take Paul back

to Jerusalem. Perhaps Festus was receiving bribes from the Jews how had come from Jerusalem. I am reluctant to criticize Paul. I don't think that he made a mistake here. Paul was a Roman citizen and he exercised his rights as a citizen, which was the normal and the right thing for him to do.

Going back to Jerusalem would have surely meant death for him. He doesn't purposely make himself a martyr. In fact, he did what he could to avoid martyrdom. Friend, there are a people today who wear a hair shirt—and God didn't give it to them. In other words, they like to take the position of a martyr. I've had a number of people who have told me that I should rejoice that I have cancer because now I can suffer for Christ and maybe die for Christ. Well, I can tell you, I don't feel that way about it. I want to get rid of the cancer. I want to live. I think a person is depressed spiritually and mentally if he wants to put on a hair shirt and lie on a cold slab. Martin Luther tried that and he found it didn't accomplish anything."

I agree with Brother McGee that we should be more interested in living for the Lord than to die for Him. But if our lot in life is to die, we sure should accept it and go forth willingly. Only by God's grace can we have the faith to do that. Paul told the Corinthian church to do everything they did for the glory of God.

1 Cor 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Cor 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

1 Cor 10:33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

The one thing we know about Paul was he was a man who could deal with whatever situation presented itself. We don't read letters where he complains about the tough times upon him, he just acknowledges what is happening and goes on knowing that God knew all about it. I think we would all be better Christians if we could reach this high level of faith like Paul

Phil 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Phil 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

Phil 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Phil 4:12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

III. Festus and Agrippa

Acts 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

Meanwhile, dignitaries arrived in Caesarea to make acquaintance with the new procurator. This included Agrippa II and his consort Bernice. Agrippa II was the son of Agrippa I who had died at Caesarea as recorded in Acts 12:23. Over the years, the Romans had granted Agrippa I rule over much of the region. He was a Jew and though not formally the king of Judea, he held much authority under the Romans in the region.

The mention of his companion Bernice reveals the moral depravity common among the elite of the day. Bernice had left her first husband and married her uncle. During that time, she left him and began living with her brother, Herod Agrippa II, in the basest of immorality. She would later become the mistress of Titus as he entered the region not long thereafter.

Acts 25:14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

Acts 25:15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

Acts 25:16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

After Agrippa and Bernice had spent some time at Caesarea, Festus confided in them of his dilemma concerning Paul. He noted that there was a 'leftover' from the regime of Felix. He related how the Jewish authorities had vehemently accused Paul, seeking judgment against him. Festus continued to piously note the Romans would not execute a man without him first meeting his accusers face to face and answering their charges.

Since the case was taken out of the hands of the Sanhedrin and Festus, Paul must be sent on to Rome at the first opportunity. Festus would send him and the papers concerning his case to Caesar. Since they had to go by sailing ship, it took planning and time to find one to send Paul. While they were waiting for a ship, King Agrippa came down to visit the new governor with his sister Bernice. Festus decided to take this opportunity to lay out the case before King Agrippa and see what he had to say about it. King Agrippa was the last King of the Jews and he had great power and influence. He had charge of all the Temple officers and also the power to appoint the high priest. If Festus could get his ruling on Paul, this would no doubt greatly disarm any opposition the Jews had on him.

*Acts 25:17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.
Acts 25:18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:
Acts 25:19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

Continuing, Festus related to Agrippa that he had heard the charges of the Jews against Paul and that their charges basically amounted to nothing as far as he was concerned. The whole of their accusations centered about “one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” Festus referred to the superstition of the Jews. The word so translated (deisidaimonia) can have both a good and a bad sense. The bad sense as the English implies was of ‘superstition.’ However, the word could also refer to ‘religion’ in general.

Because Agrippa was a nominal Jew, Festus likely used the word in the latter sense and was understood as such by Agrippa. There likely was an air of scorn in the tone of Festus as he referred to “one Jesus” which Paul claimed to be alive. Implication of Paul’s continual emphasis on the resurrection is clear.

*Acts 25:20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.
Acts 25:21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.
Acts 25:22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*

Festus went on to indicate (again somewhat deceitfully) that he did not wish to arbitrate what he thought was a religious debate. He said, he offered to allow Paul to return to Jerusalem to be judged on these matters. The truth is that Festus was playing games with Paul for political reasons. Paul clearly and deliberately appealed to Augustus. Augustus was the title of the Caesars. The word translated as Augustus (sebastov sebastos) literally meant the ‘reverend one.’

The term Caesar was more of a family name, dating back to Julius Caesar which most Roman emperors had appropriated to themselves and became another generic reference to them. The actual reigning ‘Caesar’ at the time was Nero. Agrippa therefore told Festus that he would like to hear Paul so a hearing was set for the next day.

Festus relates the whole story about Paul to King Agrippa. He explains how the charges were not brought forth that he expected, but seemed to all stem around the fact of one man named Jesus whom that Paul said was still alive. It seemed

to him superstition was what it was all about. I believe this really touched King Agrippa, and we see that he asks to hear Paul himself.

Acts 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

Another kangaroo court was held. As noted, Agrippa and Bernice “with great pomp” made their appearance. The chief captains of the Roman army based there were invited as well. These were chiliarchs or commanders of a thousand soldiers (a cohort). There were five cohorts based at Caesarea. The “principal men of the city” were present. Festus planned an ostentatious display. He, perhaps for political reasons, hoped to impress Agrippa and gratify his wish to hear a prisoner. He assumed Paul would play along with his charade.

Festus brings Paul out before both King Agrippa, his sister, and the chief captains and principal men of the city. John Calvin commented that perhaps King Agrippa thought he might gain something from hearing what Paul had to say. He certainly could have if he would have believed what Paul speaks. But perhaps this gathering was done to strengthen the believers in the churches. God’s providence is so un-searchable and he accomplishes things in ways and manners that we don’t usually understand. But for Paul to have such an audience and to speak with power and authority from on high, it had to encourage the other believers. It encourages me even to this day.

Acts 25:24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

Acts 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

Festus pompously addressed the assembled forum. He recounted that the Jewish leadership at Jerusalem had been “crying that he ought not to live any longer.” Festus sought to present his alleged predicament in that the Jews were yelling for Paul’s death and yet he could find no cause of such. Then Paul had to go and complicate things by appealing to Caesar. Poor Festus. If he had any integrity, he could have and should have just released Paul. That would have been the just thing to do.

Acts 25:26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

Acts 25:27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

Festus complained to Agrippa that he did not know what to write to Caesar regarding charges against him. To flatter Agrippa, he asked his advice in the matter. Ironically, Festus was right when he said that it was unreasonable to send a prisoner and not record the charges against him. It would be the same as to referring a case to the supreme court and not specifying the charges against the defendant.

Festus declares that the Jews had stated that Paul ought not to live. But in his trial, Festus found nothing wrong in Paul's life that was worthy of death. So he comes before Agrippa that he might examine him and that Festus could write his findings to Caesar. It would not be reasonable to send forth a prisoner without a clear definition of the crimes that he was accused. The Roman law required that when a man was sent to Rome on appeal, all the papers relating to the case should be sent, and all the testimony that had been taken, and a clear statement made by the one who sent him concerning the accusation.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.